



Campylobacteriosis



What is campylobacteriosis?

Campylobacteriosis is an infectious disease caused by *Campylobacter* [kam-pi-lō-'bak-tər] bacteria. Most people who become ill with campylobacteriosis get diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, and fever within 2 to 5 days after exposure to the organism. The diarrhea may be bloody and can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. The illness typically lasts one week. Some infected persons do not have any symptoms. In persons with compromised immune systems, *Campylobacter* occasionally spreads to the bloodstream and causes a serious life-threatening infection.

How common is *Campylobacter*?

Campylobacter is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States. Many cases go undiagnosed or unreported, but the CDC estimates that campylobacteriosis affects over **2.4 million** persons every year. In 2011, there were **187 cases** of campylobacteriosis in San Bernardino County, an incidence rate of **8.5 cases per 100,000**. The disease occurs more frequently in the summer than in the winter. Infants and young adults are at higher risk to contract this disease.

How do people get infected with this germ?

Campylobacteriosis usually occurs in single cases, but it can also occur in outbreaks. Most cases of campylobacteriosis are associated with eating raw or undercooked poultry meat, or from cross-contamination of other foods by these items. Infants may get the infection by

coming in contact with poultry packages in shopping carts. *Campylobacter* outbreaks are usually due to consumption of unpasteurized milk or contaminated water. The organism is not usually spread from person to person, but this can happen if the infected individual is producing a large volume of diarrhea.

Even one drop of juice from raw chicken meat can infect a person! One way to become infected is to cut poultry meat on a cutting board, and then use the unwashed cutting board or utensil to prepare vegetables, or other raw or lightly cooked foods. The *Campylobacter* from the raw meat can then spread to the other foods.

What can be done to prevent *Campylobacter* infection?

Some simple food handling practices can help prevent *Campylobacter* infections. Over →

Follow these easy tips to avoid becoming ill, or making guests or customers sick:

- Cook all poultry products thoroughly. Make sure that the meat is cooked throughout (no longer pink) and any juices run clear. All poultry should be cooked to reach a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.
- If you are served undercooked poultry in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Wash your hands with soap before preparing food.
- Wash your hands with soap after handling raw foods of animal origin and before touching anything else.
- Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen by using separate cutting boards for foods of animal origin and other foods and by carefully cleaning all cutting boards, countertops, and utensils with soap and hot water after preparing raw food of animal origin.
- Avoid consuming unpasteurized milk and untreated surface water.
- Make sure that persons with diarrhea, especially children, wash their hands carefully and frequently with soap to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.
- Wash your hands with soap after contact with pet feces.



How is the infection diagnosed?

Campylobacter infection is diagnosed when a

culture of a stool (fecal) specimen yields the organism.

How can campylobacteriosis be treated?

Almost everyone infected with *Campylobacter* recovers without any specific treatment. Patients should drink extra fluids as long as the diarrhea lasts. In more severe cases, antibiotics such as azithromycin or erythromycin can shorten the duration of symptoms if given early in the illness. Your doctor will decide whether antibiotics are necessary.

Are there long-term consequences?

Most people who get campylobacteriosis recover completely within 2 to 5 days, although sometimes recovery can take up to 10 days. Rarely, *Campylobacter* infection results in long-term consequences, such as arthritis. Some people develop a rare disease called Guillain-Barré syndrome that affects the nervous system. As many as 40% of Guillain-Barré syndrome cases in this country may be triggered by campylobacteriosis. A person's immune system is "triggered" to attack the body's own nerves, resulting in paralysis that lasts several weeks and usually requires intensive care.

For more information, please contact:

County of San Bernardino
Department of Public Health
Communicable Disease Section
www.sbcounty.gov/pubhlth
(800) 722-4794

To report a possible foodborne illness, contact:

County of San Bernardino
Department of Public Health
Division of Environmental Health Services
www.sbcounty.gov/dehs
(800) 442-2283